

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA

June 12, 2007

Dear Mayor Gérald Tremblay,

Re: Ben's, A "Montreal Institution" for all Canadians

The National Council of Women of Canada would like to convey to you our concern over the future of **BENS Delicatessen-Restaurant**, a classic example of Streamlined Modern design with a magnificent terrazzo floor. It has been closed and is being sold to a developer who we understand has plans to demolish it.

It is very ironic that there is now an exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, American Streamlined Design: The World of Tomorrow, but a beautiful public example of it is about to be destroyed (http://www.mmfa.qc.ca/en/expositions/exposition_43.html). The developer, Sam Benatar is quoted as saying, "It isn't worth anything." Surely, **BENS** is as important to preserve as the objects in the museum exhibit.

We believe this Montreal institution, one that has been claimed by many Canadians, is one of significant value, worth preserving for future generations to cherish and enjoy, and thus should be proclaimed a **Heritage Building**. It was the meeting place favoured by luminaries from Liberace to Leonard Cohen, to former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, singer and actor Bette Midler and the Montreal Canadiens hockey team, plus millions of Montreal visitors. Autographed celebrity photos, including Burl Ives, the Ink Spots, and Ed Sullivan, attest to its heyday and place in our history. The current owners claim that it is where Montréal's famous smoked meat originated.

Ben and Franny Kravitz opened Ben's Delicatessen in 1908. It moved to its current Art Deco building at 990 Blvd. de Maisonneuve, corner of rue Metcalfe in 1950, where it remained open until 2006.

It was designed by Charles Davis Goodman (1894-1962), a McGill University graduate, a fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, and one of the architects of a number of well-known Montreal buildings. These include the 1931 Jewish General Hospital, the 1948 Pascal Hardware, the now demolished and much mourned 1948 Laurentien Hotel, and the recently demolished 1930 Mount Sinai Sanatorium, reminiscent of Southern Deco.

Apparently McCord Museum has agreed to preserve Bens Delicatessen-Restaurant memorabilia, including autographed pictures of celebrities that decorated the yellow formica and chrome deli. This is not enough. **Ben's must be preserved in its entirety**, within the framework of the proposed new development. Whether used as a restaurant or in any other number of innovative ways, it is an asset to Montreal in history and in revenue as a tourist attraction and potential movie set.

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The International Coalition of Art Deco Societies (ICADS) has awarded Art Déco Montréal, which is a federate of one of our Local Councils of Women, the honour of hosting the 10th World Congress on Art Deco in Montreal from May 24 to May 30, 2009. Preserving BENS will demonstrate to the international delegates that Montreal takes pride in its heritage.

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) founded in 1893, represents Local Councils of Women and Study Groups in 20 Canadian cities, Provincial Councils of Women in 5 Canadian provinces, along with 27 National Organizations affiliated with NCWC. It is estimated that NCWC has three quarters of a million members.

NCWC is a member of the International Council of Women, which represents the National Councils of Women in more than 70 countries, and of the Regional Council of the Americas which represents National Councils of Women in the Western Hemisphere. NCWC has accreditation with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Our mission is to empower all women to work together towards improving the quality of life for women, families, and society through a forum of member organizations and individuals.

Ben's is a building of which legends are made. It reflects a far too precious part of our history to set aside and destroy. We believe that you appreciate this and will help assure that it is named a Heritage Building and preserved.

Sincerely,

Karen Dempsey, President

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